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SIPDIS

FOR IO/HR (COLLEEN NEVILLE AND CARI ENAV)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/21/2019

TAGS: PHUM PREL KISL KDEM PGOV OPDC

SUBJECT: NORWAY WANTS TO WORK WITH U.S. ON DEFEATING
"DEFAMATION OF RELIGION" RESOLUTIONS

REF: A. A: STATE 128320

¶B. B: SOMMERS-NEVILLE (OSLO/IO) EMAILS 12/18/2009

¶C. C: 09 OSLO 647

Classified By: Political and Economic Counselor Cherrie S. Daniels for
reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶11. (C) In response to Ref A, which was primarily directed to posts in countries which support the "Defamation of Religion" resolutions problematic to the USG, poloff contacted Colleen Neville in IO/HR to determine next steps specific to the Government of Norway. Neville informed poloff (Ref B) that IO wishes to determine whether Norway would be willing to play an active role in supporting the broader U.S. "Action Plan to Combat Racial and Religious Discrimination and Intolerance." Poloff immediately contacted Vebjoern Heines, UN Human Rights Council (HRC) Coordinator in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Human Rights and Democracy Section, on December 18. Heines promised to evaluate the Action Plan and get back to post before Christmas about how and whether Norway could support it. This cable is an interim response to meet deadline in Ref A. Post will report septel as soon as we hear back from the MFA.

More Background on Defamation of Religion Issue

¶12. (C) Norway has been a consistent and vocal opponent of the so called "Defamation of Religion" resolutions proposed in New York and Geneva for over a decade (see ref C, paragraph 3). On December 18, poloff spoke with Anne Merchant, Senior Advisor in the MFA Human Rights and Democracy Section. Merchant emphasized (a) that the supporters and opponents of the idea of a "defamation of religion" resolution are extremely far apart, (b) that the outcome of the "Working Group on Complementary Standards" will be extremely important for subsequent initiatives in Geneva and New York, and (c) that Norway grounds its opposition to such resolutions in the fact that human rights belong to individuals, not to groups or belief systems.

¶13. (C) Despite prodding by poloff, Merchant had little to offer in the way of advice on how to peel off members of the G77 from supporting a defamation resolution, although on a previous occasion (see ref C), Merchant suggested identifying a few influential/active G77 countries, courting their support, and if it is forthcoming, using that as an "out" for other wavering countries. Merchant also reiterated that U.S.-Norway cooperation on this issue is best organized in Geneva, where Claire Hubert should be our main contact in the Working Group, not in Oslo.

¶14. (C) Per ref B, IO is also interested in finding out what approach on Freedom of Expression Norway believes would garner the most widespread support in the HRC. Norway did not vote for that U.S.-supported resolution when it came to a

vote in September due to its own "hateful expressions" laws.
Post will include in septel any new insights the Norwegians
offer on this matter, as well.

WHITE